

Child-rearing values in southern Brazil: Mutual influences of social class and parents' perceptions of their children's development

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Abstract:

The authors examine social-class differences in parents' child-rearing values for autonomy, self-direction, and conformity and the extent to which their values are influenced by their perceptions of their developing children's characteristics. Parents from 25 middle-class or working-class families in a Brazilian city participated in interviews, observations, and completed Kohn's Q-Sort measure when their children were 3, 36, and 72 months of age. Parents' child-rearing values differed significantly by social class: middle-class parents were more likely to value autonomy and self-direction in their children, whereas working-class parents were more likely to value conformity. In addition, the strength and direction of parental values changed significantly as their children developed. Parents were less likely to value autonomy and self-direction when their children were 36 months than when they were either 3 or 72 months. Middle-class parents were more likely to value conformity when their children were 36 than when they were younger or older.

Keywords: parents' child-rearing values | Brazil | United States | social class | longitudinal study | perceptions of child characteristics

Article:

All contextualist theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge, 2008; Vygotsky, 1997) posit a dynamic interplay between context and individual, in which influences on development are multidirectional. For example, the everyday activities and interactions in which young

children are involved are influenced both by the personal characteristics of the individuals (values, beliefs, past experiences, temperament, motivations, etc.) and the characteristics of the context (culture, social class, immediate setting, etc.).

The link between context and child-rearing values, however, is often treated in a more unidirectional fashion. Cultural anthropologists and cross-cultural psychologists interested in these types of values generally focus their attention on the role played by culture in the development of those values (Chen & French, 2008; Harkness & Super, 2002; Hofstede, 2001; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Keller, 2007). Similarly, psychologists and sociologists point out that parents' social class influences their child-rearing values (Curtner-Smith, Bennett, & O'Rear, 1995; Grusec, 1997; Holden, 1995; Kohn, 1977, 1995; Lareau, 2000, 2002; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989; Spade, 1991; Weininger & Lareau, 2009). Parents' child-rearing values are thus often portrayed in the literature as though they are determined by the parents' cultural or social-class group. Thus, for example, scholars have argued that parents in cultures that score higher on individualism are more likely to value children's autonomy and those that score higher on interdependence are more likely to value conformity (e.g., Chen & French, 2008; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007); within societies, middle-class families are more likely to value their child's autonomy than are working-class families, who are more likely to value conformity (e.g., Kohn, 1995; Luster et al., 1989).

Does the evidence on the influence of these broad sociostructural forces on parenting values suggest that children, as they develop, have no influence on them? Children change greatly during the first years of life in terms of their social, emotional, cognitive, and motor development (Colson & Dworkin, 1997; Lopes et al., 2007; Lopes et al., 2009; Piaget & Inhelder, 1966/1969). Looking at the direction of influence, however, most scholars focus on what it is that parents value, the emotional climate fostered in the home, or the behaviors in which parents engage (see, e.g., Baumrind, 1989; Fletcher, Wall, Cook, Madison, & Bridges, 2008; Hoffman, 1994; Maccoby, 1992). There is reasonable evidence of stability over time in parents' child-rearing styles and practices, particularly relative to other parents in the sample, although absolute values may change (Dallaire & Weinraub, 2005; Forehand & Jones, 2002; Holden & Miller, 1999; Verhoeven, Junger, Van Aken, Deković, & Van Aken, 2007) and some evidence of stability in parents' child-rearing beliefs and values (McNally, Eisenberg, & Harris, 1991; Scott & Hill, 2001).

However, although some authors have argued that parenting behavior is far more influenced by parents' values and beliefs than by children's own characteristics (Belsky, 1984; Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Holden & Miller, 1999), others have pointed out child characteristics also have important effects on their parents' behavior (Kagan & Snidman, 1991; Shaw, Gilliom, Ingoldsby, & Nagin, 2003). Certainly parents undergo change, particularly during the transition to parenthood (e.g., Demo & Cox, 2000), and the complexity of interpersonal relationships is highlighted by the fact that the child's temperament may influence the adjustment to parenthood itself (Belsky & Rovine, 1990). Nonetheless, in a review of the literature on children's influences on parents' values, Knafo and Galansky (2008) found that this "under-researched topic" (p. 1155) revealed "more questions than answers" (p. 1157).

This article uses a contextualist perspective to explore the mutual influences of social class and parents' perceptions of their developing children's characteristics on parents' child-rearing values for autonomy and conformity in a sample of Brazilian parents. As noted above, numerous scholars have shown a link between social class and these parental values. However, the work of Kohn and his colleagues (Kohn, 1977, 1995; Kohn & Slomeczynski, 1990) goes further than most in providing an explanatory framework for the link between class and values.

Kohn argues that middle-class parents (i.e., those who work in the professional sphere and who have relatively high levels of education) are more likely to attribute their success to the exercise of autonomy. In contrast, working-class parents (i.e., those who work in the nonprofessional arena and who have comparatively low levels of education) are likely to attribute their own success to an ability to carefully follow rules that others have laid down. Given that parents want their children to be successful, these views about what leads to success in their own lives influence the ways in which they try to raise their children. Specifically, middle-class parents are more likely to value self-direction in their children, whereas working-class parents are more likely to value their children following rules. Kohn and his colleagues have provided support for this view with research from a range of societies, including the United States, Italy, Poland, Japan, and Ukraine (Kohn, Slomeczynski, & Schoenbach, 1986; Kohn et al., 2001). Kohn does not argue that parents want their children only to conform (if they are working class) or only to be autonomous (if middle class); all children need to conform sometimes and be self-directing at other times. Kohn's point is simply that parents' conditions of life are such that they are more likely to associate future success either with a greater propensity to follow the rules that others have established or to act with a greater degree of autonomy and to differentially encourage such characteristics in their children as a result.

Lareau (2000, 2002) has also argued that North American middle- and working-class families, whether Black or White, have different values that lead to providing their children with very different types of experiences ("concerted cultivation" on the part of middle-class families and "accomplishment of natural growth" for working-class families). Weininger and Lareau (2009) then built on Kohn's thesis by examining parents' behaviors with their children; they found clear support for Kohn's overall position, but noted that working-class parents, although using many directives with their children, also allowed them a lot of freedom (e.g., to play as they saw fit). Similarly, although middle-class parents certainly encouraged their children to exercise self-direction, they also controlled their children's lives in many spheres. Chin and Phillips (2004) argued, in contrast, that differences in parents' provision of experiences to their children were in fact more related to differences in parents' income, time, and knowledge and to the children's own preferences and temperament than to class-based values. Cheadle and Amato (2011), drawing on a nationally representative data set to conduct a quantitative assessment of Lareau's qualitative findings, found that social class was indeed related to parents' provision of experiences, but noted that parental income was one of the major contributors to this link. There may still be some doubt, therefore, that social class is related to parenting child-rearing goals in the way that Kohn had argued.

Social class has been widely used in Brazil as an explanatory variable (Ribas, Seidl de Moura, Soares, Gomes, & Bornstein, 2003). In many cases, however, class background has been operationalized simply as parental income or as a marker for income, such as children's

attendance at public versus private schools (Oliveira, Frizzo, & Marin, 2000). A more complex measure of social class uses parental occupation, or occupational status, either separately from, or in combination with, education, as in Hollingshead's (1975) approach (Piccinini, Tudge, Marin, Frizzo, & Lopes, 2010; Ribas et al., 2003). Ribas and colleagues showed that both paternal occupation and parental education level are related to parents' beliefs about child rearing in Brazil (Ribas, Seidl de Moura, & Bornstein, 2003; Seidl de Moura et al., 2004). However, Kohn's thesis has not been tested in Brazil and no longitudinal research has been conducted there to examine stability or change in parents' child-rearing values for autonomy and conformity.

This study therefore tests two hypotheses. The first is that Brazilian parents' social-class background, as determined by education and occupation criteria (Hollingshead, 1975), is related to certain child-rearing values. Specifically, middle-class parents are more likely than their working-class counterparts to value autonomy and self-direction and working-class parents, in contrast, are more likely than middle-class parents to value conformity. The second hypothesis is that these child-rearing values (for autonomy vs. conformity) do not remain steady over the first 6 years of the child's life but are influenced by parents' perceptions of their children's developing characteristics.

Method

Study Design and Participants

Participants are 23 parents, drawn from 25 families, who participated in a larger study of first-born children called the Porto Alegre Longitudinal Study (Piccinini, Tudge, Lopes, & Sperb, 1998). The Porto Alegre Longitudinal Study recruited expectant first-time mothers primarily from hospitals and clinics across the city, so as to ensure a wide socioeconomic range. The city is in the south of Brazil and is home primarily to descendants of German, Italian, and Portuguese immigrants, most of whom arrived in the 19th century. Descendants of the indigenous population are also found, as are people who would, in the United States, be termed "*Black*"; however, intermarriage over many generations has led to a wide range of skin color (Tudge, 2008). The city is in a region that is more economically advanced than many other parts of Brazil, is home to a federal university, and adults have a wide range of educational backgrounds and current occupations. Participants were selected from this larger sample because they were clearly distinguishable either as middle or working class as measured by Hollingshead's (1975) four-factor model based on education and occupation criteria (i.e., taking into account, where possible, the education and occupation of both parents) and because they met the same education and occupation profile as that of the first author's related study of families from different societies (Tudge, 2008).

Fourteen of the 25 families (56%) were middle class (i.e., had at least some college and were engaged in semiprofessional or professional occupations), whereas the remaining 11 families were working class (i.e., did not have a college degree and were engaged in nonprofessional occupations). Five families in the sample (one middle class and four working class) were headed by a single mother, and a slightly greater proportion of families (60%) had boys.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach to examine the relations between parents' social class and their child-rearing values over time. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from mothers and fathers, individually, when their children were 3 months, 36 months, and 72 months old. Of the 45 parents who could have contributed to the study, 28 parents (61% of whom were mothers) participated in data collection at Time 1, 36 parents (58% of whom were mothers) participated at Time 2, and 37 parents (57% of whom were mothers) participated at Time 3. Our analyses focus only on the 23 parents (65% of whom were mothers) from whom we have complete Q-sort data and (in all but one case) interview data at each of the three data-collection times. Details on each participating parent are provided in the appendix.

Measures

Socioeconomic status. A family social-status score was computed following Hollingshead (1975) guidelines. If both parents worked outside the home, scores for both parents' occupations and educational attainments were included; in single-parent families or in families in which only one parent worked outside the home, the social-status score was derived from the occupation and education of just the one person.

Child-rearing values. When their children were 3, 36, and 72 months, fathers and mothers independently completed Kohn's Q-Sort measure of parents' child-rearing values (Kohn, 1977). The measure consists of 13 items. Five items are indicative of self-direction values such as "I want my child to exercise good sense and sound judgment" and "I want my child to be interested in how and why things happen." Four items are indicative of conformity values such as "I want my child to have good manners" and "I want my child to obey his/her parents." The remaining four items are irrelevant "filler" items. Parents were asked to select the three most-valued items and the three least-valued items and to identify which was most important of all and which was least important of all. The top-ranked item received a score of 5, and the two next-ranked items each were scored 4. The bottom-ranked item was scored 1, and the other two low-ranked items each were scored 2. All filler items and those that were not selected as important or unimportant were scored 3. The 3-month data allow an assessment of idealized parenting values; by 36 and 72 months, of course, children are more than capable of expressing their own wishes and feelings.

Three scores were computed based on parents' responses to the measure. An overall score for autonomy was computed by summing across all six selected items (with all conformity items reverse scored), and thus is most responsive to the participants' selection of items. A self-direction score was computed by adding each participant's rankings of the five self-direction items (whether selected or not) and a conformity score was computed by adding the rankings of the four conformity items. The means for self-direction (wanting children to develop "internal standards for behavior"; Kohn & Slomczynski, 1990, p. 61) and for conformity (wanting children to conform "to externally imposed rules"; Kohn & Slomczynski, 1990, p. 61) were multiplied by six to ensure a similar range across the three measures. The autonomy scores ranged in value from 10 to 26 (with higher scores indicating a greater preference for children to decide things for themselves and lower scores signifying that children should learn to obey their parents). The scores for self-direction and conformity ranged in value from 13 to 23 and 12 to 24, respectively.

Parent beliefs and perceptions. At each data collection period mothers and fathers participated in semistructured qualitative interviews. We have complete interview data from 21 of the 23 parents (one father was not interviewed at 72 months and another father's responses to one of the relevant questions were too vague to be coded). During the interviews, parents were asked, individually, about their childhood experiences, current occupation, and parenting style; about their perceptions of the children's behavior, temperament, and characteristics; and their hopes and aspirations for their children. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. For parental perceptions of the child's characteristics, we focused on parents' responses to the following questions: "How would you describe [your child's] character?" (at 3 months), "How would you describe [your child's] character, his temperament?" and "How obedient is your child?" (at 36 and 72 months). We coded each parent's responses into one of three categories: predominantly easy to deal with (e.g., "My child is very obedient" or "she's always been a happy child"), predominantly difficult to deal with (e.g., "he's very aggressive" or "he's very difficult to deal with"), and mixed (both easy and difficult). Of the 59 interviews, 21 (36%) were coded independently by two coders (kappa ranging from .76 to 1.0). Disagreements were resolved after discussion. In addition, we drew on the interviews when the children were 36 months for a more nuanced understanding of the parents' values for autonomy or conformity than could be obtained from the Q-Sort data.

Results

Quantitative Findings

We first tested our hypotheses with standard inferential statistics. However, our participants were not randomly selected from one or more known populations, and we do not wish to imply that we can generalize these findings to families living in different regions of Brazil or in other countries. We used inferential statistics to estimate differences that are large enough to discuss (in other words, "significant" differences are those that are meaningful). We ran a series of 2 (social class) \times 2 (parent gender) repeated-measures MANOVAs (with time, at 3, 36, and 72 months, as the repeated measure). Results showed that parent gender had no significant impact on the results, either as a main effect or in interaction with social class. Paired *t* tests were also run to see whether mothers and fathers from the same families differed significantly in their child-rearing values. As they did not, we dropped parent gender from the analyses and we will not distinguish between mothers and fathers in these results.

In terms of autonomy, time was significant at the multivariate level (Wilks's Λ [2, 20] = 12.34, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .55$) and there was no interaction of time with social class. As can be seen in Table 1, the pattern of results for parents' valuation of autonomy reveals that, over time, there was a clear quadratic effect, with parents valuing autonomy less when the children were 36 months than they had when the children were 3 months but again valuing it more highly when the children had reached 72 months, $F(1, 21) = 24.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .54$. There was no interaction of time with social class, but over time middle-class parents were significantly more likely to value autonomy than were their working-class counterparts, $F(1, 21) = 10.68$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .34$.

Table 1. Parents' Child-Rearing Values When the Children Were 3, 36, and 72 Months, Means (*SDs*).

Social Class	Autonomy	Self-Direction	Conformity	<i>N</i>
3 Months				
Middle class	21.15 (3.24)	20.40 (1.77)	16.15 (2.88)	13
Working class	17.04 (3.24)	17.88 (2.68)	19.65 (2.69)	10
36 Months				
Middle class	16.77 (3.32)	17.35 (2.22)	19.15 (2.95)	13
Working class	14.20 (3.05)	15.84 (2.32)	20.25 (2.57)	10
72 Months				
Middle class	19.69 (3.17)	19.20 (2.55)	17.19 (2.64)	13
Working class	15.80 (3.62)	16.92 (2.56)	19.95 (2.65)	10

The same pattern was seen in terms of the parents' value for self-direction. In the multivariate analysis, time was significant (Wilks's Λ [2, 20] = 11.18, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .53$) and there was no interaction of time with social class. Time had a significant quadratic effect, $F(1, 21) = 22.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .52$, and the middle-class parents were significantly more likely to value self-direction than were their working-class counterparts, $F(1, 21) = 7.92$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .27$.

In terms of the parents' valuation of conformity, time was not significant (Wilks's Λ [2, 20] = 2.38, *ns*) and neither was there an interaction of time with social class. However, the quadratic effect for time was significant, $F(1, 21) = 4.73$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .18$, revealing that parents were more likely to value conformity when their children were 36 months than at either of the other times. Middle-class parents, over time, valued conformity less than did their working-class counterparts, $F(1, 21) = 9.29$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .31$.

These data indicate that these Brazilian parents' child-rearing values were clearly influenced by their social-class background but that they also changed dramatically during their children's first 6 years of life. However, we have yet to show that the child's own characteristics, or at least the parents' perceptions of those characteristics, were responsible for the changes. It is possible that the children's influence was generic rather than particular; in other words, having *any* 3-year-old could be enough to make parents value self-direction less than they did when the child was an infant.

We therefore tested the correlations among these values at each age. We anticipated that there would be high correlations among these values at any one age (negatively in the case of conformity). However, if the effect of having a 3-year-old were generic (all parents decreasing their valuation of self-direction and increasing their valuation of conformity to the same extent), the correlations between 3 months and 36 months would remain high. As expected, the within-age correlations were all significant, as can be seen in Table 2. More revealing is the fact that there were no significant correlations between any of these values between 3 and 36 months, indicating that the parental changes in values were not systematic, but could have varied according to the nature of their children. An alternative hypothesis is simply that there is no stability in values over time. This hypothesis, however, is belied by the fact that the correlations among these values at 3 and 72 months and at 36 and 72 months were significant in 11 of the 18 possible cases.

Table 2. Significant Correlations Among Autonomy (A), Self-Direction (SD), and Conformity (C), at 3, 36, and 72 Months.

	A 3	SD 3	C 3	A 36	SD 36	C 36	A 72	SD 72	C 72
A 3	—								
SD 3	.80***	—							
C 3	-.84***	-.62***	—						
A 36	.38	.34	-.25	—					
SD 36	.33	.33	-.14	.93***	—				
C 36	-.12	-.06	.10	-.67***	-.44*	—			
A 72	.41*	.41*	-.50*	.62**	.51*	-.28	—		
SD 72	.29	.30	-.39	.64***	.65***	-.15	.89***	—	
C 72	-.44*	-.44*	.45*	-.51*	-.36	.35	-.86***	-.71***	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data provide a more subtle picture of these parents' values as well as supporting the quantitative findings. The parental interviews when their children were 36 months show that the middle-class parents were far more likely than their working-class counterparts to say that they valued aspects of the child's autonomy and individuality, whereas working-class parents were more likely to stress the importance of obedience and respect. However, this does not mean that the latter solely valued conformity and obedience in their children or that middle-class parents only valued autonomy.

All the working-class parents said that obedience was a really important quality for them. For example, Gustavo's mother said that she was "furious" when Gustavo disobeyed her, and said that she wanted him to be quiet, obedient, and respectful and be a "studious" student. (Pseudonyms are used throughout; translations by the first and last authors.) Renato's father commented, "He has to know how to behave herself, and not be rude." However, working-class parents also talked about encouraging autonomy, although it was most likely to be in one of two contexts. Two parents spoke of the child having the freedom to play (though within clear limits): As Daniel's mother said, "A child has to know his limits, right? . . . He has the freedom to spread his toys throughout the house, but I don't allow him to destroy my things or mess with things that aren't his." The other context was the child's future, more than half of the working-class parents replied that the choice of occupation was up to the child. Cesar's father, for example, when asked about what he wanted his son to be doing 10 years later and as an adult, said, "You have to wait and see what he wants . . . there's no point me wanting something and him not."

All but one of the middle-class parents also said that the child's future occupation was his or her choice, but they also were far more willing than their working-class counterparts to say that they appreciated their child's sense of autonomy as a child, even while recognizing that this led to conflict. Tânia's mother, for example, did not like the fact that she had to tell her daughter the same thing many times and commented that she was a stubborn child. However, she noted, her perseverance would be a very helpful quality, to be "a battler . . . in pursuit of her goals." The most important thing for her daughter at this age was "to be an explorer of her horizons." Pedro's father also complained about the fact that it was difficult to get his son to change his mind, but also pointed out that he liked this aspect of his personality—a bit like his father, who also did not

appreciate anyone telling him what or what not to do. Each of these parents talked about the importance of their children having many choices.

It was not the case, therefore, that the middle-class parents did not want their children to be obedient and respectful—the majority talked explicitly about the importance of these qualities. However, unlike their working-class counterparts, they were far more likely to do so in a context that also showed that they valued their child's autonomy and described entering a dialog with the child rather than simply telling him or her as to what to do. Enrique's father exemplified this perfectly, stating, "And so it's like this, it does no good to order [him]—you have to negotiate, talk." However, as he admitted immediately later, "At times you have to just tell him 'you're going to do this because I want you to; it's me who's the grown-up here.'" Similarly, Carlos's mother said that she really got cross with him when he was disobedient, but she also recognized that her son was fine when not being pressured—he accepted suggestions but not force.

In brief, and as suggested by the quantitative data presented earlier, the middle-class parents were generally more supportive of their children's autonomy whereas the working-class parents were more likely to stress the importance of obedience and respect. The interviews, however, provide a more nuanced picture, with parents valuing both self-direction and obedience, although differing in degree.

The interviews also revealed changes in the parents' values as their children aged. As noted above, the relevant interview questions were coded into one of three categories (the child is predominantly easy to deal, difficult to deal with, and mixed). As shown in the appendix, 17 of the 21 parents for whom we have complete interview data changed their assessment of how easy or difficult their children were to deal with at 3, 36, and 72 months of age, 10 of the 11 middle-class parents and 7 of the 10 working-class parents.

Responses from 7 of the 11 middle-class parents perfectly matched the U-shaped curve shown in the quantitative data. They all found their child to be more difficult at 36 months than at 3 months but easier to deal with at 72 months than at 36 months (a mixture of easy and difficult was treated as more difficult when following "easy" but as easier when following "difficult"). It is thus hardly surprising that the parents were less likely to value autonomy and more likely to value conformity when their children were 36 months than they were when the children were either 3 or 72 months. For example, Roberta's middle-class mother said the following about her 3-month-old: "I thought that she'd be a crier, that she wouldn't let me sleep. . . . But she's not, she's being great." When asked whether Roberta was easier than expected, her mother replied, "Yes, much better." By the time that Roberta had reached 3 years of age, however, her mother said that she was not very obedient. "She's very stubborn. I don't know, there's no point talking with her. She doesn't obey you—only when she's threatened, she does. It's difficult." She continued, "The things she wants should be as she wants, when she wants, otherwise she throws a tantrum, you know. I think she's not going to be a very easy person to deal with." However, by the time that Roberta had reached 6 years, her mother said that she was a "really happy child . . . but still, she's very stubborn, very stubborn" but that "she is obedient, she always obeys when there's something that you tell her she's not going to have, right?"

Similarly, Carlos's middle-class father described him as being "calm, I think that he's really happy . . . affectionate" as a 3-month-old boy. By the time Carlos was 3 years of age, his father continued to say that he was easy to deal with and mostly obedient, but also commented on his whiny behavior, particularly when his routine changed, adding, "This happens with all of them [children], you know. And I think this way: it's a phase. . . . They're phases that he's going through." By the time Carlos had reached 6, his father commented that he was "very easy, a really good guy" although he was difficult when tired, or when he was trying to assert himself. "In his 'Your Highness' moments he's very difficult to deal with. . . . He tries to assert his will, right? And so, depending on the day, he's Piaget or Pinochet, you know?"

Just one middle-class mother thought that her daughter, Tânia, was difficult to deal with at each of the three ages, although she seemed to have adapted herself to Tânia's persistence by the time she had reached 72 months. Her mother continued to note her "strong temperament" and the fact that she was very persistent in getting the things that she wanted. Nonetheless, she said, "You have to respect her individuality, the way she is, right? She hates to wear clothes under other clothes, things under her clothes. That's the way she is. You just have to respect that." The remaining three middle-class parents (all mothers) felt that their children had become more difficult to deal with at 36 months than they had been at 3 months of age, but continued to talk primarily about them being difficult children when they had reached 72 months.

Four of the 10 working-class parents also fit into the U-shaped curvilinear pattern—that their children were viewed as being easier to deal with at 3 and 72 months than they were at 36 months. Of the remaining working-class parents, one father felt that his child was consistently easy. At 3 months, for example, he said that Gustavo is "always a playful one, you know, always laughing, always happy," and when Gustavo was 3 years of age his father commented, "He's really happy, funny, always playing, running here and there." By the age of 6, his father said of him, "He's always finding something for himself to do, to keep himself occupied during the day."

In contrast, two working-class parents felt that their children were consistently difficult to deal with. Daniel's mother said the following during the 3-month interview:

I don't know what to tell you, because I think that he seems angry. I think that he's going to be really angry. He smiles a lot, but when he's like this, irritable, wow, you just have to see him. . . . Sometimes he cries and cries and cries and you do everything, and he's not got anything wrong, he's just always crying, and then you go to put him on your lap and he tries to hit you, you know, and you have to put him down so that he doesn't hit you, because he goes like this with his hand, and I say "Ah, this is what you know, this is what you've learned," and then he seems really very angry.

When Daniel was 36 months, his mother commented, "My biggest problem with him is this, he's very [she pauses] aggressive, you know, very much like that . . . it's a little strange." She explained that she talks to him, sits him on her lap, tries to kiss him. "My intention is always to get him not to be so aggressive, you know." By the time that he had become 6 years old, his mother described him as having a "strong personality, very strong" (and she laughed). "At times I don't really know how to deal with him . . . he's stubborn, a really stubborn one."

Of the remaining three working-class parents, Gustavo's mother described him as being easy as a baby but at 36 and 72 months as being a difficult child to deal with (she clearly had a different view to Gustavo's father, as mentioned earlier), and two other parents (Renato's mother and Cesar's father) found their children to be easy at 3 and 36 months but more difficult when they were 72 months.

The interviews capture quite well the prevailing pattern (11 of the 21 parents) that we found—these first-time parents thinking that their children were just wonderful at 3 months, but finding the children more difficult to deal with as they became older and started to express their own likes and dislikes more forcefully. It is thus not at all surprising to see that parental values for autonomy and self-direction declined dramatically as their children grew from 3 to 36 months—their children, in many cases, were being more autonomous and more self-directed than the parents liked. At the same time, the quotations also show that the parents were adapting to their children's personalities and characteristics; as the children continued to develop, the parents were able to give their children more freedom of choice. This is reflective, of course, of the fact that the quantitative data show a clear U-shaped curve. However, not all parents fit into that pattern, with working-class parents less likely to do so than were middle-class parents. Three of the parents (two were working class) saw no changes in how easy or difficult their children were, and the remaining seven parents (four were working class) viewed their children either as more difficult at 36 and 72 months than at 3 months or as more difficult at 72 months than at the two earlier periods.

Discussion and Conclusion

We set out to answer two central questions in this study. The first was whether or not, in this sample of parents from this Brazilian city, there was a link between their social-class background and their child-rearing values. The second question was whether or not the children themselves, at least as referenced by the parents' perceptions, influenced their parents' values. Our results support our two main hypotheses.

As a number of scholars have shown in research conducted outside Brazil (e.g., Curtner-Smith et al., 1995; Kohn, 1977; Kohn et al., 1986; Luster et al., 1989) and within (Ribas et al., 2003), these middle-class parents were more likely than their working-class counterparts to value autonomy and self-direction in their children. Working-class parents, in contrast, were more likely to value conformity. However, as Weininger and Lareau (2009) pointed out, although middle-class parents value autonomy and self-direction in their children they also try to control them in subtle ways. Similarly, working-class parents may well want their children to learn obedience, but may still allow them independence in some areas. Our interviews clearly show that parents of both classes valued obedience and autonomy; the middle-class parents simply provided more evidence that they valued their children's efforts to assert their autonomy (within limits). It is also worth pointing out that Lareau's (2000, 2002; Weininger & Lareau, 2009) middle-class families were really upper-middle class (by education, occupation, and income criteria), as she noted. In our study, the class distinctions were not so extreme but we found the same differences in terms of the parents' child-rearing values.

Our second hypothesis was also supported—the parents’ values changed quite dramatically over time, with both groups of parents (from middle- and working-class backgrounds) being more likely to value autonomy and self-direction in their children when the latter were 3 and 72 months of age and less likely to do so when their children were 36 months old. In contrast, parents were least likely to value conformity when their children were 3 and 72 months of age but more likely to do so when their children were 36 months. However, this pattern was clearer for the parents from middle-class families than for those from working-class families, an issue that is worth further exploration.

On the basis of being able to disprove two alternative hypotheses (first that changes in values are simply generic, rather than reflecting changes in their own specific children, and second that there is no stability in parental values across time) that might have explained these findings, we think that the most likely explanation was that parents’ perceptions of changes in their children led to the changes in parental values. If the changes had been generic, reflecting either typically occurring changes in parental identity following the transition to parenthood or typically occurring changes in children as they age, one might have expected changes in the absolute levels of their values but consistency of individual differences in values among the parents. However, the correlations between parents’ values when their children were 3 and 36 months were all nonsignificant. If, on the other hand, there were no stability over time in parents’ values, we would not have found many significant correlations either between 3 and 72 months or 36 and 72 months.

This explanation is reflected clearly in the parents’ descriptions of their children and the changes they undergo as they become more independent and more assertive or try to “dominate” as one father put it. When children are just 3 months of age parents, especially first-time parents like those in this study, may have a somewhat idealized view of them, particularly when (as seemed true for most of these families) the babies are “easier” to deal with than had been expected. From this point of view one might expect different results if we had been working with parents of second- or later-born children. With the children well able to express their own likes and dislikes, their own views of what they want to do and do not want to do, these more idealized views, particularly relating to encouraging children to be independent, are tempered by the fact that the children want to be more autonomous than the parents might like. Parental perceptions of the changes in their children as they developed from 3 to 36 months clearly seemed to have an influence on the parents’ values. We have some evidence for this change in values from the interviews with parents when the children were 18 months of age (Lopes et al., 2009), but it was striking in the data reported here. To be successful, however, the family system has to be adaptive to the nature of all the individuals within it, and the parent interviews provide insight into the way in which some of them changed their own behaviors to fit better the characteristics of their children. As Chin and Phillips (2004) showed, children bring their own “child capital” (their personal characteristics, such as their temperament and their motivation) to bear; some children are more challenging than others and some have developed better strategies to encourage their parents (and others) to accede to their own wishes. Children, in the course of being socialized by their parents, in turn socialize their parents. In other words, child-rearing values are more than simply the product of culture or class but involve a dynamic interplay between aspects of the developing context and aspects of the developing individuals within that context, just as contextualist theories specify.

Finally, it is important to recognize that this study is exploratory and does not seek to generalize the findings beyond the city in which the data were gathered. Brazil is a huge and diverse country, and the inhabitants of the southern-most state are predominantly descended from Portuguese, German, and Italian immigrants from the 19th century (see Tudge, 2008). Not only are there large regional differences in Brazil, but even within each state differences between urban and rural areas should be expected. Furthermore, the number of participants is very low, meaning that the study suffers from a lack of power. Nonetheless, we found significant support for our hypotheses and feel that the findings of this mixed-methods study warrant attempts at replication in other regions of Brazil and other parts of the world.

Appendix. Parents’ Demographic Data and How Easy, Difficult, or “Mixed” They Considered Their Child at 3, 36, and 72 Months

Social Class	Child Name ^a	Parent	Marital Status	Education	Occupation	3 Months	36 Months	72 Months
Middle	Enrique	Mother	Married	Postgraduate	Secretary	Easy	Hard	Hard
		Father	Married	Postgraduate	Preschool director	Easy	Hard	—
Middle	Gabriel	Mother	Married	Secondary	Housewife	Easy	Hard	Hard
		Father	Married	Some college	Business owner	Easy	Hard	Easy
Middle	Roberta	Mother	Single	Some college	Monitor in a museum	Easy	Hard	Mix
Middle	Tânia	Mother	Married	Some college	Nursing technician	Hard	Hard	Hard
Middle	Carlos	Mother	Married	College	Teacher	Easy	Mix	Easy
		Father	Married	Some college	Business owner	Easy	Hard	Easy
Middle	Tiago	Mother	Single	Some college	Admin assistant	Easy	Hard	Mix
Middle	Pedro	Mother	Married	Some college	Teacher	Easy	Hard	Easy
		Father	Married	Some college	Theater technical director	Easy	Hard	Mix
Middle	Francisco	Mother	Married ^b	College	Party secretary	Easy	Mix	Mix
		Father	Married ^b	College	Business owner	Easy	—	Mix
Working	Daniel	Mother	Single	Secondary	Unemployed	Hard	Hard	Hard
Working	Gustavo	Mother	Married ^b	Secondary	Sells from a produce stand	Easy	Hard	Hard
		Father	Married ^b	Secondary	Night watchman	Easy	Easy	Easy
Working	Renato	Mother	Single	Secondary	Unemployed	Easy	Easy	Hard
Working	Márcia	Mother	Married	Secondary	Assistant in child care	Easy	Mix	Easy
		Father	Married	Secondary	Parking attendant	Easy	Hard	Easy
Working	Cesar	Mother	Married ^b	Some secondary	Unemployed	Easy	Hard	Mix
		Father	Married ^b	Elementary	Kitchen worker	Easy	Easy	Hard
Working	Augusto	Mother	Single	Secondary	Supermarket check-out	Hard	Hard	Hard
Working	Lia	Mother	Married	Elementary	Maid	Easy	Mix	Easy

a. All names are pseudonyms.

b. In a stable partnered, but unmarried, union.

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